

Summer 1989

## Ballast Quarterly Review, v04n4, Summer 1989

The Art Academy of Cincinnati

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B a l l a s T

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**i** would like to see a building, say, the Empire State, I would like to see on one side of it a foot-wide strip from top to bottom with the name of every brick-layer, the name of every electrician, with all the names. So when a guy walked by, he could take his son and say, "See, that's me over there on the fifty-fifth floor. I put the steel beam in." Picasso can point to a painting. What can I point to? A writer can point to a book. Everybody should have something to point to.

**Mike Lefevre**, Chicago steelworker, interviewed in Studs Terkel, *Working* (New York: Avon Books, 1975), p. 2. ■

**S**ometimes, out of pure meanness, when I make something, I put a little dent in it. I like to do something to make it really unique. Hit it with a hammer. I deliberately ---- it up to see if it'll get by, just so I can say I did it. It could be anything. Let me put it this way: I think God invented the dodo bird so when we get up there we could tell Him, "Don't you ever make mistakes?" and He'd say, "Sure, look." (Laughs.) I'd like to make my imprint. My dodo bird. A mistake, *mine*.

**Mike Lefevre**, Chicago steelworker, interviewed in Studs Terkel, *Working* (New York: Avon Books, 1975), pp. 9-10. ■

**Edward Hoagland**: My bifocals are like a horse's halter, binding the lower half of my eyes to the day's work.

**d**ali once took his pet ocelot with him to a New York restaurant and tethered it to a leg of the table while he ordered coffee. A middle-aged lady walked past and looked at the animal in horror. "What's that?" she cried. "It's only a cat," said Dali scathingly. "I've painted it over with an op-art design." The women, embarrassed by her initial reaction, took a closer look and sighed with relief. "I can see now that's what it is," she said. "At first I thought it was a real ocelot."

**Clifton Fadiman**, ed., *The Little, Brown Book of Anecdotes* (Boston: Little Brown 1985), p. 155. ■

**a** discussion between Haldane and a friend began to take a predictable turn. The friend said with a sigh, "It's no use going on. I know what you will say next, and I know what you will do next." The distinguished scientist promptly sat down on the floor, turned two back somersaults, and returned to his seat. "There," he said with a smile. "That's to prove that you're not always right."

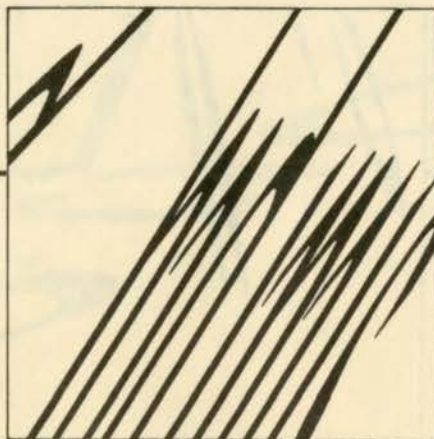
**Clifton Fadiman**, ed., *The Little, Brown Book of Anecdotes* (Boston: Little Brown 1985), p. 155. ■

**O**ne morning, after a long evening in town, several of us had monstrous hangovers. My eyes were so red I decided to wear sunglasses all day. No sooner had I emerged from my room than Mr. Wright came bounding along. "Edgar," he said with surprise, "what's the matter with your eye?" He lifted the sunglasses as he questioned me. Looking at my bleary eyes, he said sternly, "Young man, come with me," and marched me through the loggia, through his bedroom, and into his bathroom. He opened the medicine chest, reaching for something I couldn't identify. "What you need is a tablespoon of castor oil," he said, shoving the spoon into my mouth before I could protest.

**Edgar Tafel**, *Years with Frank Lloyd Wright: Apprentice to Genius* (New York: Dover, 1979), p. 152. ■

**Roy G. Biv**: Red orange yellow green blue indigo violet.





We've always been a musical family. When my grandfather was old, he elapsed into a complete fog. He wouldn't say a sensible word, week in and week out. But his nurse would bring him to the dinner table and he'd sit there and he'd eat. The night boat to Norfolk from Baltimore would come by every night at eight o'clock and it would go "Booooooaaah" as it went by the house. One night, out of this total fog he had been in for months, grandfather stood up, went over to the piano, poked it, and said, "E Flat." Then he sat down and went right back into the fog.

**Anon**, in Steven J. Zeitlin, et al., *A Celebration of American Family Folklore* (New York: Pantheon, 1982), p. 53. ■

**Edward Hoagland**: You butter a cat's paw when moving into a new home, so it can find its way back after going exploring the first time.

**Recommended**: Arthur J. Pulos, *The American Design Adventure* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988). 446 pp., hardbound. ISBN 0-262-16106-0. 300 black and white illustrations. Intriguing if hardly amusing, this is the second volume (1940s-1970s) of a history of American industrial design by a past president of the IDSA. Very dry, heady stuff (no jokes, few anecdotes, almost no gossip), but a valuable review of the evolution and elegance of utilitarian objects. We thought the dust jacket (designed by Diane Jaroch) was especially exciting.

Lunch the next day with Alfred Kazin, my old teacher...[He says] that students now resent the fact that a professor knows more than they do, want him to learn along with them in class, as in group therapy, and when caught out on homework facts, get offended instead of trying to fake through, as in the old days.

**Edward Hoagland**, "Learning to Eat Soup" in an issue of *Antaeus* (No 61, Autumn 1988) devoted to *Journals, Notebooks and Diaries*, p. 228. ■

**Geography**: George Ellis' old grandmother rode a pig home yesterday.

**Arithmetic**: A rat in the house might eat the ice cream.

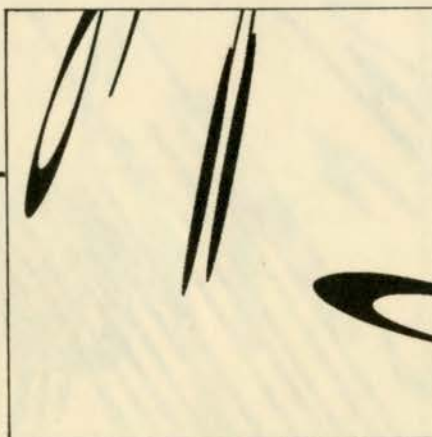
**Highly Recommended**: Gary Soto, ed., *California Childhood* (Berkeley, California: Creative Arts Book Company, 1988). 225 pp., paperback. ISBN 0-88739-057-9. A superb anthology of childhood recollections by writers who were raised in the Golden State, including M.F.K. Fisher, Maxine Hong Kingston, William Clark Powell, Gerald Haslam and others. Among our favorites are "Splitting Extraversion," an account of youthful days in church by Michael Baline ("the pseudonym of a poet who teaches at a major university in southern California"), and "How I Started Writing Poetry" by Reginald Lockett.

at last, after beating a raccoon to death (that refused to die) and after thoughtlessly shooting a rabbit (I found it dead on the trail, stomach moving with unborn young), I dreamed of being trapped myself and vowed never to do such a thing again. My game, henceforth, would be a creature neither larger or smaller than myself.

Do fur-bearing animals feel joy and fear and sadness and excruciating pain and sense of loss precisely as human beings do? I knew the answer, had known it all along but hidden it from myself. Yet a boy who spends all his time wandering the woods, isn't he expected to bring something back, something to justify his wanderings?

**Bill Hotchkiss**, "South Wolf Creek" in Gary Soto, ed., *California Childhood* (Berkeley, California: Creative Arts Book Company, 1988), pp. 23-24. ■





**t**hen she [my mother] told me how she met my father. One summer my mother went to Denver to spend the summer with her sister working in the hospital. My father happened to be stationed at Lowry Air Force Base, and they met through the local rabbi, who was the chaplain for the Jewish soldiers at the base. They had a blind date and that was the beginning of their romance, though the story is that my father was so insensitive to the fact that they were supposed to be the ones having the romance that after the first date with him he called up and wanted her to go on a double date with him--but he wanted my mother to be the date for his friend.

**Melanie Reinhold**, quoted in Elizabeth Stone, *Black Sheep and Kissing Cousins: How Our Family Stories Shape Us* (New York: Times Book, 1988) pp. 201-202. ■

**Walter Page**: The English have only two vegetables-- and two of them are cabbage.

**Voltaire**: The English have forty-two religions, but only two sauces.

**Samuel Butler**: A hen is only an egg's way of making another egg.

**Clement Freud**: If eels looked a little less like eels more people would want to eat them.

**Auguste Renoir** (when asked how an artist should learn to paint breasts): First paint apples and peaches in a fruit bowl.

**i**do not recognize the person I was forty years ago. My distress is so profound and the suppression mechanism functions so effectively, I can evoke the picture only with difficulty. Photographs are of little value. They simply show a masquerade that has entrenched itself. If I felt attacked, I snapped like a frightened dog. I trusted no one, loved no one, missed no one. Obsessed with a sexuality that forced me into constant infidelity, I was tormented by desire, fear, anguish and a guilty conscience.

**Ingmar Bergman**, *The Magic Lantern: An Autobiography* (New York: Viking Press, 1988), p. 146. ■

**E.B. White** (*Every Day is Saturday*): We can go to any restaurant and be made uncomfortable by the waiters, as waiters seem to be a breed gifted in making guests ill at ease. They are always older, wearier, and wiser than we are; and they have us at a disadvantage because we are sitting down and they are standing up. We should very much like to discover a restaurant where we would be allowed to stand up to our food, and the waiters be compelled to sit down, so we could lord it over them!

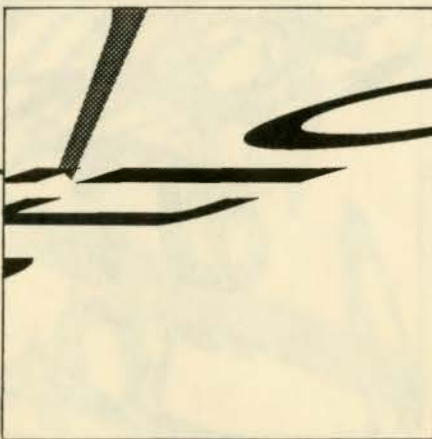
**a**round a man who has been pushed into the limelight, a legend begins to grow as it does around a dead man. But a dead man is in no danger of yielding to the temptation to nourish his legend, or accept its picture as reality. I pity the man who falls in love with his image as it is drawn by public opinion during the honeymoon of publicity.

**Dag Hammarskjöld**, *Markings* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), p. 66. ■

**p**eople went around like symphonies of smells-- powder, perfume, tar-soap, urine, sex, sweat, pomade, anuff and cooking. Some smelt of human beings in general, some smelt safe, others menacing. Father's fat Aunt Emma wore a wig which she stuck on to her bald pate with a special kind of glue. Grandmother smelt of glycerine and rose water, a lotion bought artlessly at the chemist's. Mother smelt sweet like vanilla, and when she was cross her downy moustache turned moist and gave off a scarcely perceptible order of metal. My favorite smell was of a plump red-haired young nursemaid called Marit, who was lame. The best thing in the world was to lie on her arm in her bed with my nose pressed against her course nightgown.

**Ingmar Bergman**, (recalling the smells of his childhood), *The Magic Lantern: An Autobiography* (New York: Viking, 1988), pp. 19-20. ■





**m**y great-grandfather, Alan Taylor Sherman, came to Washington with the Union Army during the Civil War. He stopped at my great-grandmother's house to get some water and she was the one who handed him the glass of water. He put this hand over hers as he took the glass of water, and then he got off the horse, and after that, they got married.

**Helen Tenchi**, quoted in Steven J. Zeitlin, et al., *A Celebration of American Family Folklore* (New York: Pantheon, 1982), p. 91. ■

**d**reiser wrote this magnificent novel [*Sister Carrie*]. It was published in 1900; it was then and still is the best first novel ever written by an American. It's an amazing work...The book was a magnificent achievement but the publisher, Doubleday, didn't like it, they were afraid of it. So they buried it. And naturally it did nothing; I think it sold four copies. I would go crazy too in that situation. Dreiser rented a furnished room in Brooklyn. He put a chair in the middle of this room and sat in it. The chair didn't seem to be in the right position so he turned it a few degrees, and he sat in it again. Still it was not right. He kept turning the chair around and around, trying to align it to what--trying to correct his own relation to the universe? He never could do it, so he kept going around in circles and circles. He did that for quite a while, and ended up in a sanitarium in Westchester, in White Plains.

**E.L. Doctorow** (remembering Theodore Dreiser), interviewed in George Plimpton, ed., *Writers at Work: Eighth Series* (New York: Viking, 1988), p. 307. ■

**i**drove her to the airport. On the way between Farosund and Bunge, we met a police car, an unusual sight in northern Gotland. I was seized with panic and thought they had come to fetch me. Ingrid told me I was wrong. I calmed down and left her at Visby airport, but when I got back home to Hammars, a little snow had fallen and there were fresh footprints and tire-tracks outside the house. I was then utterly convinced the police had been looking for me. I locked all the doors, loaded my rifle and sat in the kitchen where I could keep watch on the road and the parking place. I waited for hours, my mouth and throat dry. I drank some mineral water and, in my mind, I thought calmly but without hope that this was the end. The March twilight descended silently and sharply. No police appeared. Gradually I realized that I was behaving like a dangerous lunatic. I unloaded the rifle, locked it away and cooked dinner.

**Ingmar Bergman**, *The Magic Lantern: An Autobiography* (New York: Viking Press, 1988), pp. 95-96. ■

**O**ne of my ancestors had once driven a carriage for Napoleon...So one day he was strolling there with his walking cane and his Sunday best, and he came upon a skunk. The skunk of course had a nice big stripe up his tail and a great plume and it reminded him of Napoleon whom he had driven in his carriage. And he said, "Well, Napoleon, what are you doing here?" He took his cane and gave the skunk a big smack and of course the skunk retaliated. The old gentleman was completely unaware of it because he had no sense of smell and he returned home but no one would let him in the house. They made him go to the barn where they burned the Sunday clothes which he had brought all the way from Germany.

**Carol Maas**, in Steven J. Zeitlin, et al., *A Celebration of American Family Folklore* (New York: Pantheon, 1982), pp. 58-59. ■

**O**ne nice thing about the crafts. You work two hours at a time. There's a ritual to it. It's break time. Then two more hours and it's dinner time. All those are very good times. Ten minutes is a pretty short time, but it's good not to push too hard. All of a sudden it comes up break time, just like a friend knocking at the door that's unexpected. It's a time for swapping tales. What you're really doing is setting the stage for your work.

**Nick Lindsay** (son of the poet Vachel Lindsay), a carpenter and poet from Goshen, Indiana, interviewed in Studs Terkel, *Working* (New York: Avon Books, 1975), p. 671. ■





**i** must have been round the age of five, when I learnt that an old lady living at the back of us was dying. I was very intrigued with this, and spent many hours looking at the house from a back window: I wanted to see the poor old lady ascending into heaven. I did not know if she would be in a perpendicular or horizontal position, what clothes she would be wearing, and particularly, whether she would be able to navigate the railway bridge that stood near the house.

**Leonard Ellisdon**, quoted in John Burnett, ed., *Destiny Obscure* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 36. ■

**t** hen I should be reading, I am almost always doing something else. It is a matter of some embarrassment to me that I have never read Joyce and a dozen other writers who have changed the face of literature. But there you are. I picked up *Ulysses* the other evening, when my eye lit on it, and gave it a go. I stayed with it only for about twenty minutes, then was off and away. It takes more than a genius to keep me reading a book.

**E.B. White**, interviewed in George Plimpton, ed., *Writers at Work: Eighth Series* (New York: Viking, 1988), p. 11. ■

**h** e [Thomas Merton, a writer and a Trappist monk] was so nice, so jolly. He wasn't a dour monk at all. He was a kind friend and interested in everything. I often went down to visit him at the monastery in Kentucky. The Abbot would give him a day off, and I'd rent a car. Tom would get an old bishop's suit out of the storeroom and start out in that. Then we would stop in the woods and he'd change into his farmworker's blue jeans and a beret to hide his tonsure. Then we'd hit the bars across Kentucky. He loved beer, and he loved that smoked ham they have down there. He was a wonderful person. He wanted to read contemporary writers, but the books were often confiscated, so we had a secret system. I sent the books he wanted to the monastery psychiatrist in Louisville, who would get them to Merton... Once I asked, "Tom, why do you stay here? You could get out and be a tremendous success in the world." He answered that the monastery was where God wanted him to be.

**James Laughlin**, interviewed in George Plimpton, ed., *Writers at Work: Eighth Series* (New York: Viking, 1988), pp. 172-173. ■

**m** y grandmother would sometimes choke on her food, and have to go out on the side porch in Shillington, where one or another member of the family would follow and hammer on her back while she clung, gagging, to the porchrail... I also would choke now and then. My album of sore moments includes a memory of crouching above my tray in the Lowell House dining hall at Harvard, miserably retching at something in my throat that would not go up or down, while half-swallowed milk dribbled from my mouth and the other students at the table silently took up their trays and moved away. On the edge of asphyxia, I sympathized with them, and wished that I, too, could shun me.

**John Updike**, *Self-Consciousness* [his memoirs] (New York: Knopf, 1989), p. 49. ■





**i** had come with Mies [van der Rohe] so we left together. I either stopped at his apartment or he stopped at mine for a drink. I asked him why he had refused even to acknowledge Moholy-Nagy [at dinner] since they both had come from the Bauhaus. He said because he thoroughly disliked Moholy's methods, didn't admire at all the way he operated, and found him too aggressive. But those weren't the real reasons. He said that Moholy had used the name "Bauhaus" in the school in Chicago illegally and that angered him.

He said he had been the last director of the Bauhaus in Germany when it was broken up and that the bylaws of the Bauhaus were such as to ensure that no one could take over the name or the curriculum without the permission of the last director. Otherwise anyone could jump in and say they were descendants of the Bauhaus. And, of course, Moholy had never asked Mies.

**Katherine Kuh**, "An interview with Katherine Kuh" in *Archives of American Art Journal*, vol 27 no. 3, 1987, p. 24. ■

**m**y first memory is of being on a train which derailed in a rainstorm in Nebraska one night when I was two--and of hearing, as we rode in a hay wagon toward the distant weak lights of a little station, that a boy my age had just choked to death from breathing mud. But maybe my first real memory emerged when my father was dying. I was thirty-five and dreamt so incredibly vividly of being dandled and rocked and hugged by him, being only a few months old, giggling helplessly and happily.

**Edward Hoagland**, "Learning to Eat Soup" in an issue of *Antaeus* (No.61, Autumn 1988) devoted to Journals, Notebooks and Diaries, p. 225. ■

**m**y earliest memory (I believe I was less than three) is of being in the garden with my brother and our big white dog, Picu. All three of us are rolling in the grass. Next to us on a stool is Mother, talking with a neighbor.

**Mircea Eliade**, *Autobiography: Vol 1, 1907-1937, Journey East, Journey West* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980), pp. 5-6. ■

**t**he governess decided that I had no right to drink water when I came home from school, on the grounds that I was perspiring. I was not allowed to go near the pump any more, nor to enter the kitchen or the dining room until dinner time. I had to stay in my room, which my brother and I shared with the governess. I suffered horribly from thirst. One day, taking advantage of the fact that I was left alone in the room, I began to search. In the closet I stumbled over a bottle labeled "boric acid." I knew that this solution was used as a disinfectant, but I was too thirsty to care. I drank almost half the bottle. I did not feel sick until later, and then I told my mother what I had done. Lying in bed and pretending to be more ill than I was, I heard, as a consolation, the sharp, bitter dialogue between Mother and the governess.

**Mircea Eliade**, *Autobiography: Vol 1, 1907-1937, Journey East, Journey West* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980), pp. 5-6. ■

**e**arly training is of the utmost importance. The familiar slogan, "Catch them when they're young," is applicable to many human practices; it has special significance when applied to art students, religious training, and the taming of wild animals.

**Malvina Hoffman**, *Sculpture Inside and Out* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1939), p. 38. Suggested by Constance McClure, a reader from Cincinnati. ■

**i** call my mother's whole family psychic. I don't know what you'd call them. When they die they leave a message to tell somebody they're leaving and goodbye. My aunt had this pretty, really pretty glass thing over the table. They were cleaning the dishes, and they heard a crack in the room. The whole table had just cracked in the middle. Then they received a telegram the next day saying that an uncle had died.

**Eddita Osborne**, in Steven J. Zeitlin, et al., *A Celebration of American Family Folklore* (New York: Pantheon, 1982), p. 115. ■



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One of my great culinary moments was being taken as a tot to my black nurse's house to eat clay. "What this child needs," she had muttered one day while we were out, "is a bait of clay." Everybody in South Carolina knew that blacks, for reasons unknown, fancied clay. Not until I came to read Toynbee's *A Study of History* years later did I learn that eating clay, or geophagy, is a prehistoric habit (it fills the stomach until you can bring down another aurochs) surviving only in West Africa and South Carolina. I even had the opportunity, when I met Toynbee at a scholarly do, to say that I had been in my day geophagous. He gave me a strange, British look.

The eating took place in a bedroom, for the galvanized bucket of clay was kept under the bed, for the cool. It was blue clay from a creek, the consistency of slightly gritty ice cream. It lay smooth and delicious-looking in its pail of clear water. You scooped it out and ate it from your hand. The taste was wholesome, mineral, and empathic. I have since eaten many things in respectable restaurants with far more trepidation.

**Guy Davenport**, "The Anthropology of Table Manners" in *The Geography of the Imagination* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1981), pp. 346-347. ■

**French proverb:** Spinach is the broom of the stomach.

a final word about a brief encounter between Mies [van der Rohe] and [Walter] Gropius in Chicago. At a luncheon honoring Gropius the two men were seated next to each other and though for years they had not been particularly friendly, they chatted together politely. I was sitting nearby and at one point I heard Gropius say to Mies, "All that work and for what--the picture window?"

**Katherine Kuh**, "An interview with Katherine Kuh" in *Archives of American Art Journal*, vol 27 no 3 1987, p. 24. ■

The following are actual explanations offered by drivers on traffic accident reports, compiled by the National Safety Council:

I was on my way to the doctor with rear end trouble when my universal joint gave way causing me to have an accident.

Coming home, I drove into the wrong house and collided with a tree I don't have.

The guy was all over the road. I had to swerve a number of times before I hit him.

I had been driving for 40 years when I fell asleep at the wheel and had an accident.

From "Safety Views," a publication of the Madison (Wisconsin) Area Safety Council. Suggested by Jeanne Debbink, a reader from Nashotah, Wisconsin. ■